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ABSTRACT

In North Carolina, Alternative Learning Programs (ALP) is a designation applied to a variety of activities, locations, and student characteristics. This report focuses on descriptive information about the state's ALP efforts, teachers, and the students they serve. Two hundred and fifteen schools and programs met the evaluation criteria as ALPs. Seventy-five identified themselves as alternative schools, while 140 identified themselves as alternative programs. Half of all the ALPs relied on the state for at least three-quarters of their support. The predominant ALP setting was a separate classroom in an existing school (41%). In general, students served in an ALP were at-risk students, and about half of middle and high school students had repeated one or more grades. Although the ALPs have multiple goals, they almost universally included academic achievement with a strong emphasis on self-esteem and social behaviors. A significant portion of the ALPs do not serve long-term suspended students, expelled students, or exceptional students, raising the question of how needs of these groups are being met. Most students had achieved "desirable" status by the time they exited the program, but many students had not. It was not possible to determine whether the percentage of students kept in schools was higher than it would be without the ALPs, but it is evident that a genuine effort is being made by many programs. Two appendixes contain evaluation questions asked and a discussion of the method for estimating the number of ALP teachers. (Contains 5 figures and 32 tables.) (SLD)

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Alternative Learning Programs Evaluation: Part 1 Report

November 1996

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Office of Instructional and Accountability Services
Division of Accountability Services, Evaluation Section

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Alternative Learning Programs Evaluation: Part 1 Report

November 1996

Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education.....Jay Robinson, Chairman
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Office of Instructional and Accountability Services
Division Accountability

Evaluation Report
Alternative Learning Programs
1995-96

Executive Summary

Background

G.S. 115C-238.47 was amended in the 1995 General Assembly and focused the evaluation of Intervention/Prevention Programs specifically on Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs). There will be two reports to the State Board of Education and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. The present report focuses on descriptive information about alternative learning programs, ALP teachers, and the students they serve. The second report will be published in Spring 1997 and will focus on student outcome data and how programs can be improved.

During the 1995-96 school year funding for alternative schools and programs was provided through the consolidation of seven allotment categories into one.

ALP Definitions

Alternative Learning Programs is a designation applied to a wide array of activities, locations and student characteristics. Alternative Learning Programs refer to efforts that may have an academic, therapeutic, and/or discipline focus.

In order to focus the evaluation, programs were included that met the following definition:

> A program that serves students at any level, serves suspended or expelled students, serves students whose learning styles are better served in an alternative program, or provides individualized programs outside of a standards classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.

The evaluation is limited to ALPs that:

- provide primary instruction,
- offer course credit or grade level promotion credit in core academic areas,
- are for selected at-risk students,
- are outside the standard classroom,
- are for a designated period of time (not drop in), and/or
- assist the student in meeting requirements for graduation.

Scope of Evaluation

Based on the legislative intent and purposes of the evaluation, six broad evaluation areas are specified:

1. Where are the ALPs located across the state?
2. What are the types of ALPs?
3. Which students are served by these programs?
4. How are program funds used?
5. What is the impact of the ALPs?
6. How can ALPs be improved?

The first four questions are the focus of this document. An additional question was added concerning the characteristics of certified teachers working in ALPs.

Characteristics of ALPs

Location

Two hundred and fifteen schools and programs that met the criteria for the evaluation were identified across the state.

ALPs were identified in 101 of the 119 LEAs (85%).

The Western DPI Accountability Region had the lowest percent of LEAs with an identified ALP (74%).

Setting

In a telephone interview of all ALPs, seventy-five (75) identified themselves as alternative *schools* while 140 identified themselves as alternative *programs.* These numbers are still being verified.

Primary settings for ALPs included:

- separate school, separate campus 32%
- separate school, same campus 9%
- school-within-a-school 12%
- existing school building, separate classroom 41%
- other (National Guard Armory, Community Center) 7%

Types of Students Served

Approximately two-thirds of the ALPs serve students at the High School and Middle School level. About one in eight (14%) serves students at the Elementary School level.

About one-third report *not* serving suspended students. More than half report not serving expelled students. About 40 percent report not serving exceptional students.

The most common type of program was a regular classroom (75%). Catch-up/remedial (49%), extended day (36%), dual enrollments (26%), and accelerated programs (18%) were also represented in the ALPs.

Program Components

ALPs have multiple goals. The goals of the ALPs almost universally included academic achievement. There was a strong emphasis on issues of self esteem and social behaviors, followed by reducing violence and disruptive behavior.

Instructional components that were common to all grade level ALPs included small classes, needs assessment, individualized curriculum or instruction, social skill development, and self-paced instruction.

Strategies to improve discipline and student conduct included three incentives that were used by ALPs at all grade levels more than 50 percent of the time: praise for high performance and good behavior; special activities such as a reward; and student choice in learning.

Five disciplinary strategies were used by ALPs at all grade levels: student conference with teacher, phone call to parents, parents asked to come to school, use of review of placement, and time out outside classroom. Short term suspension, removal from the classroom, and warnings of suspension, were also used by a large percentage of upper grade ALPs.

The criteria reported by the programs as being used for selecting students included, in descending order, discipline/behavior problems, poor attendance, and low academic achievement. These criteria did not always correspond to the reasons cited for individual student admission.

Characteristics of Students

Students in ALPs were predominantly in the upper grades. The highest level of student enrollment is at the tenth grade.

For both High School and Elementary School students, the most common reason for entry into an ALP was academic. For Middle School students, disruptive behavior was the most common reason.

Attendance and truancy was a significant reason for participation in ALPs for High School students (27%).

At-Risk Indicators

ALP students are at-risk, most often exhibiting a number of indicators. Half of the students live in single parent households, and about half of Middle and High School ALP students had repeated one or more grades.

About two-thirds of the Middle School ALP students were suspended some time in the 1995-96 school year. Half of the Elementary School ALP students had been suspended, but less than one-third of the High School ALP students had been suspended.

Most suspended students were suspended for reasons related to *disruptive behavior*.

Expulsions occurred for about 3 percent of High School and Elementary School students. For Middle School students, 6 percent had been expelled during the 1995-96 school year.

Exit Status

For those students *who left an ALP before the end of the school year*, a majority had a "desirable" status after exiting the program (e.g., returned to home school, graduated). However, a sizable number of students had an undesirable status. Students who either dropped out, were expelled or suspended, or went to training school or prison, represented 40 percent (High School), 32 percent (Middle School) and 6 percent (Elementary School) of those who exited the ALP before the end of the school year.

Characteristics of Teachers

Over half of the teachers in ALPS (55%) had ten or more years of teaching experience, and less than 10 percent were first year teachers.

Two-thirds of these teachers considered themselves adequately trained/prepared to work with students like those in their ALP.

From 49-60 percent of teachers in Middle and High School ALPs rated the following three categories as being inadequate to meet instructional needs:

- high interest reading material,
- computer availability, and
- reference material availability.

Over 95 percent of ALP teachers were certified in grade and subject.

About one-third of teachers in combined High School and Middle School programs did not consider the ALP facilities to be adequate. The most common reason for rating the facility as less than adequate was "gets to hot or cold." "Insufficient access to equipment" was a close second.

Characteristics of Funding

Program Costs

Based on self-reported data from program administrators in ALPs, the median estimated budget for *alternative schools* was $239,811, and $70,000 for *alternative programs*.

Half of the ALPs relied on state funding for at least three-quarters of their support.

Uses of Funds

Overall, top uses of funds were to hire teachers and to purchase instructional materials.

The top four uses of funds in the Services category were:

- instructional support,
- staff development,
- transportation, and
- guidance counseling.

Summary

For the Personnel category, the top uses of funds were:

- teachers,
- teaching assistants, and
- guidance counselors.

Funds for administrative staff (principals, assistant principals, coordinators) were used in High School and Middle School ALPs but not for Elementary School ALPs.

Instructional materials were the most common use of funds in the Equipment/ Instructional Material category. Computers and software were also common uses of funds.

ALP students are indeed at-risk students.

Even though High School grade levels contain the most ALP students, especially 10th grade, Middle School ALP students appear to have the highest levels of risk (e.g., suspensions, expulsions).

The focus of ALPs is both on discipline and academics, with slightly different emphasis across grade levels.

The predominant settings for ALPs include existing school buildings, separate classrooms (41%) and separate school, separate campus (32%). Seven percent of ALPs use other community facilities such as the National Guard Armory or YMCA.

Programs are dependent on state funding.

There are a significant portion of schools/programs that do not serve long term suspended students, expelled students or exceptional students. There are still questions about how the needs of these students are being met through Alternative Learning Programs.

ALPs are attempting to address diverse needs of at-risk students. Based on the status of those who had exited the program, we are still losing too many students to negative outcomes. It cannot be determined at present whether the percentage kept in school by ALPs is higher than it otherwise would be without such programs; but a genuine effort is being made by many programs to impact positively on students' lives.

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Legislative Background

G.S. 115C-238.47 was amended in the 1995 General Assembly and focused the evaluation of Intervention/Prevention Programs specifically on Alternative Learning Programs. Beginning with the 1995-96 school year, the evaluation is to continue for a five year period. The evaluation is to include all alternative schools and programs in the state, regardless of funding source. The sections that follow outline specific elements of the legislation that focus on defining, developing, and funding alternative learning programs.

Change in Reporting Timelines

The 1996 General Assembly amended the reporting timelines from February 15, 1997 to December 1996. Because student outcome data is not available for analysis until December, this change in the reporting timeline will make it necessary to bring two reports to the State Board of Education and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. These reports will be presented at different times. The first report published November 1996 will focus on descriptive information about alternative learning programs, ALP teachers, and the students they serve. The second report will be published in Spring 1997 and will focus on student outcome data and how programs can be improved. There may also be subsequent, smaller reports or briefs as the continuing data analysis yields important issues or trends.

Definition of Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs) from the Legislation

The legislation defined an Alternative Learning Program model as one that:

> *serves students at any level, serves suspended or expelled students, serves students whose learning styles are better served in an alternative program, or is designed to use multiple strategies, which serve students in the standard classroom or provide individualized programs outside of a standard classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives and return to a standard classroom setting.*

The legislation identified the following criteria that should be reflected in an Alternative Learning Program:

- maintain state standards,
- have a well-defined mission,
- offer appropriate educational opportunities, and
- hold high expectations for staff and students.

Additionally, an Alternative Learning Program may include:

- smaller classes and lower student/teacher ratios,
- flexible scheduling,
- modification of curriculum and instruction to meet individual needs,
- school-to-work transition activities,
- necessary academic, vocational, and support services for students and their families, and
- appropriate measures to correct disruptive behavior, teach responsibility, good citizenship, and respect for rules and authority.

Goals of ALPs

As written in the legislation, the primary goal of ALPs is to reduce dropout rates through improved attendance, behavior, and educational achievement. When appropriate, programs should increase the following:

- successful school-to-work transitions for students through educationally linked job internships, mentored job shadowing experience, and
- the development of personalized education and career plans for participating students.

The legislation also provides for ALPs the option of placing students in ALPs on an involuntary basis in connection with suspensions and expulsions, based on model guidelines developed by the State Board of Education.

Funding Changes

During the 1995-96 school year, state funding for alternative schools and programs was provided through the consolidation of seven allotment categories into one. For FY 95-96 only, the allotments for each of the seven categories were calculated separately and then consolidated into one funding category called the At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools category, or PRC69 in fiscal terms. This consolidation of funds was intended to provide more flexibility to schools and districts in terms of being able to spend the funds for areas of greatest need for students at risk. In 1995-96, no restrictions were placed on the transfer of this money from the At-Risk Student Services/Alternative schools allotment to other purposes, but waivers were required from the State Board of Education (SBE) to do so. Of the initial allotment of $87.3 million in the At-Risk Student Services/Alternative School category in 1995-96, only two budget transfers occurred via State Board of Education waivers. Those two transfers were made by two different school districts and totaled $103,700, one tenth of one percent of the state total, which indicates that LEA's responsibly used the flexibility in terms of transferring these funds for other uses.

For the 1996-97 school year, the initial allotment is $105.9 million, for which the State Board of Education adopted a new funding formula for the At-Risk Student Services category based on Average Daily Membership and number of poor children in each district. The first priority for $14 million of the appropriation by the 1996 General Assembly is to enable every high school to have a uniformed school resource officer. Local boards of education may use any remaining funds for other programs to ensure school safety, prevent violence, and provide alternative learning programs. No waivers are required this year for transfer of funds from the At-Risk Student Services.

Evaluation Process

Purposes of the Evaluation

Purposes of the evaluation are determined by specifications in the legislation, as well as conversations with legislative and education staff. The legislation specifies that an evaluation:

- assess, over a five year period, the success, quality, and effectiveness of the programs;
- provide a fiscal analysis of how State funds for these programs were used, and
- provide information on how to improve or modify the programs.

Discussion with legislative and education staff also revealed an interest in:

- where the programs are located, including availability in each district and the actual site of the program; and
- the characteristics and needs of students served in these programs, especially disruptive and violent students.

There is difficulty in collecting some kinds of data that are central to addressing certain areas of interest. These data collection obstacles place limits on the evaluation with regard to those areas of interest. However, the evaluation design attempts to respond to all of the evaluation purposes to some extent and to respond in a more in-depth manner to selected evaluation purposes. The evaluation questions address the specific legislated and elaborated purposes of the evaluation and provide the framework for the evaluation design.

Evaluation Questions for Overall Evaluation Design

Based on the legislative intent and purposes of the evaluation, six broad evaluation areas are specified. They include:

- where the ALPs are located across the state,
- the types of ALPs implemented,
- which students are served by these programs,
- how program funds are used,
- the impact of the ALPs, and
- how ALPs can be improved.

Each of the six broad evaluation questions contains a number of subsidiary questions, some of which could be applied to more than one broad evaluation question; however, each subsidiary question is listed under a single broad evaluation question. The evaluation questions and the subsidiary questions are included in Appendix A.

Refined ALP Definition to Focus Evaluation

The legislated definition of Alternative Learning Program was broad enough to include virtually all special services provided either in a separate instructional program or the regular classroom. In order to refine the focus of the evaluation so that it would be feasible to distinguish Alternative Learning Programs from other intervention and support programs, for purposes of the evaluation the definition of Alternative Learning Program became:

> *a program that serves students at any level, serves suspended or expelled students, serves students whose learning styles are better served in an alternative program...or provides individualized programs outside of a standard classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.*

The definition was further clarified to focus the evaluation on schools and programs that were aiming to keep students on track for grade level promotions and graduation. This focus was implemented by requiring that schools and programs in the evaluation be limited to those that:

- *provided primary instruction,*
- *offered course credit or grade level promotion credit in core academic areas,*
- *were for selected at-risk students,*
- *were outside the standard classroom,*
- *were for a designated period of time (not drop in), and/or*
- *assisted the student in meeting requirements for graduation.*

These criteria determined when an alternative school or program met the evaluation definition. They also made an evaluation of this scale and scope more feasible and the total number of evaluation targets (215) more manageable and more similar in terms of intended results for students.

Identifying ALPs as Evaluation Targets

Through a multi-step process, a total of 215 ALPs were identified as evaluation targets for the 1995-96 school year. First, written questionnaires were sent to superintendents asking them to identify all ALPs in their district, including those that met the definition and those that did not. All ALPs were further screened as suitable

evaluation targets through a structured telephone survey. For schools and programs that still could not be classified as meeting the evaluation criteria, further telephone and written communication occurred to clarify their status.

At times, the information suggested that more than one program was actually operating under the identified ALP name. More information was sought to determine if multiple programs were in fact operating and a new ALP designation was given when additional programs were identified. A distinct program was one in which one set of activities was provided to a similar group of students under one administration.

Results of the various methods used to identify all ALPs in North Carolina are published in a directory, which has become a popular resource document for school personnel and others. This directory was revised and reissued in November 1996.

Evaluation Questions for Part I Report

This report focuses on a description of programs, teachers, and students in ALPs. Future reports will add information from other data sources not yet available, such as End-Of-Grade tests and case studies, to address the questions of program impact and program improvement more thoroughly.

This report deals with areas of interest related to the location and description of ALPs in North Carolina, the students who are served by the ALPs, and the teachers who instruct in them. Table 1 below provides a summary of the evaluation questions contained in this report and the data sources related to each of them.

Table 1. Evaluation Questions and Data Sources for Part I Report

Evaluation Questions		Data Sources
1.	Where are Alternative Schools and Programs located and how are they distributed across the state?	Telephone and mail surveys
2.	What are the characteristics of Alternative Schools and Programs?	Program Survey, telephone interviews
3.	What are the characteristics of students served by these programs?	Student Data Form, Program Survey
4.	What are the characteristics of teachers working in these programs?	Teacher Survey
5.	How are funds for these programs used?	Program Survey

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Data Sources Used to Answer Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was implemented using a combination of surveys which included: a telephone survey for basic program information, a survey of alternative schools and programs, a student data form, a teacher survey, and visits to two alternative schools and one alternative program. Table 2 summarizes the instruments and how they were used to collect specific data.

Table 2. Data Sources for Evaluation Report

Instrument	Description	Respondents	Data Collection Schedule
Telephone Survey for Basic Program Information	Collected basic information about nominated schools and programs.	ALP administrator	Fall 1995 or when new ALP was identified
Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs	Written survey sent to all schools and programs considered to meet the evaluation criteria. Survey requested detailed information about the ALP, general funding information, and comments about improvement of ALPs.	ALP administrator	March 1996 or when new ALP was identified
Student Data Form	Written questionnaire completed for every student enrolled in an identified ALP: Demographic information; reasons for entry and exit of program, disciplinary history, and progress toward promotion/graduation.	ALP teachers and school personnel. (Large schools were offered financial assistance to hire a data clerk to help complete these forms. Eight schools took advantage of this offer.)	January 1996 and June 1996
Teacher Survey Form	Written questionnaire with demographic information about teachers, teacher educational background, instructional methods, opinions about ALPs, questions on how to improve ALPs.	Certified teacher in identified ALP. Surveys and self addressed envelope distributed. Teacher could return survey anonymously by placing completed survey in courier mail.	May 1996

ALP Survey Return Rates

Cooperation in completing and returning the various surveys was very good. Return rates were over 75 percent (Table 3) for three data sources, and an estimated 57 percent for teachers.

Table 3. Return Rates for Data Sources

Data Source	Total Number	Number Returned	Percent Returns
Telephone interview	N= 310	310	100
Program Survey	N= 215	171	80
Student Survey	N=15,000*	11,900	79
Teacher Survey	N= 1,184**	654	57

*Number of students is based on an estimate of projected students served provided by ALP staff during the telephone survey

**Methods for determining estimated populations can be found in Appendix B.

Characteristics of Alternative Learning Programs

All schools and programs that were identified in the initial search (310) were contacted by telephone and completed a telephone survey of basic information. ALPs that passed the telephone screen and were officially entered into our database (215) were then sent a written Program Survey for more detailed information. ALPs that did not return the Program Survey were contacted by phone and given additional opportunities to complete a survey. In all, 171 (80%) completed a Program Survey by the final deadline.

When the information is available, analysis for this report is based on the telephone survey (N=215). However, much of the reported information was available only from the Program Survey (N=171).

Grade-Level Groups for Analysis

The respondents of the Program Survey (N=171) were divided into four Grade-Level Groups based on the population they served. Grade-Level Groups conform to divisions that are made by schools in structuring their own instructional programs. The groups represent alternative schools and programs that serve:

Only High School students **HS** (N=63)
High School and Middle School students **H/MS** (N=51)
Only Middle School students **MS** (N=32)
Only Elementary School students **ES** (N=10)
Combination (N=15)

The Combination group refers to ALPs that served all grade levels. This report focuses on the more discrete Grade-Level Groups because there is more consistency in responses within those groupings. "Combination" as a category has no intrinsic meaning and would make interpretation difficult for this report.

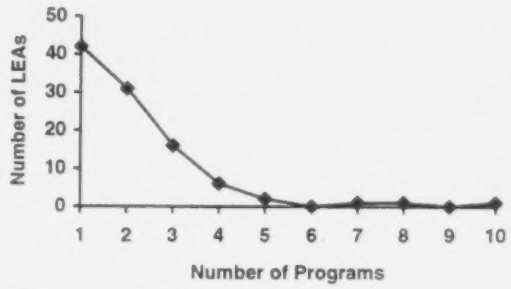
When an analysis demonstrates a noticeable difference between Grade-Level Group data, the results will be provided for Grade-Level Groups. If no noticeable difference is apparent then the total population (N=171) is reported.

Location of ALPs

Alternative schools and programs were identified in 89 of the 100 counties. Of the 11 counties that did not have an identified program, 8 were in extreme eastern or western areas of the state and 7 of these counties had school enrollments under 4,000.

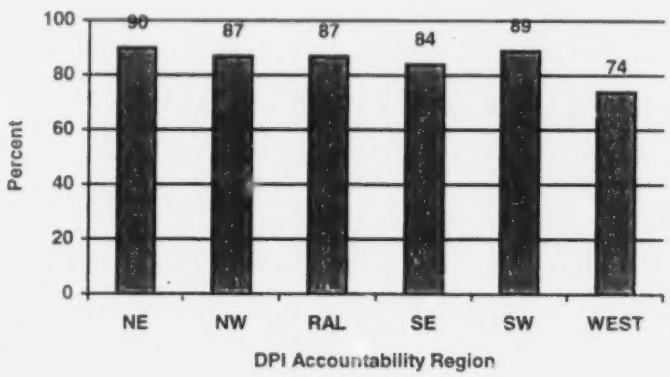
ALPs were identified in 101 of the 119 LEAs (85%) in 1995-96. While 42 percent of the LEAs had one ALP, some had multiple ALPs and one LEA reported having 10 programs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of ALPs per LEA



ALPs were distributed throughout the state. For illustration purposes, an analysis of the number of ALPs by DPI's accountability regions (former education regions) was conducted. The largest percent of ALPs were in the Raleigh region (24%); but all regions were represented. The percent of LEAs that had an ALP varied with DPI accountability region. The range was from 90 percent of LEAs having an ALP in the Northeast Region, to 74 percent of the LEAs having an ALP in the Western Region (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent LEAs Within DPI Accountability Regions with ALPs



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Basic Facts About ALPs

In the telephone survey, ALPs were asked about their status either as a school or a program, about the expected number of students they would serve, and about whether they served various categories of students with disciplinary or special education status. Self-reported status as a school may not coincide with official state designation as a school (i.e., assigned a school code and a state funded principal). Table 4 summarizes the telephone responses for all of the identified ALPs (N=215).

There was a wide range in the expected number of students to be served. Most of the programs were of modest size with 50 percent serving 40 or fewer students. Ten percent were large and served between 150 and 1,000 students. The largest program served students in a self-paced program without much teacher directed instruction.

ALPs operated in a variety of settings. A large plurality (41%) were found in existing school buildings, but using separate classrooms. About one third (32%) were separate schools on their own campus. Another 9 percent were separate schools but operating on the same campus as a regular school. Schools-within-schools accounted for one in eight (12%) of the ALPs.

Table 4. Characteristics of Identified ALPs (N=215)

Characteristics	Number or Percent
Number of students expected to enroll annually:	
Average	80
Median	40
Self identified as:	
Schools	35%
Programs	65%
ALP operates in:	
Separate school, separate campus	32%
Separate school, same campus	9%
School-within-a-school	12%
Existing school building, separate classroom	41%
Other (National Guard Armory, YMCA, Community Center)	7%
Percent serving students in :	
High Schools	66%
Middle Schools	62%
Elementary Schools	12%
Percent serving:	
Expelled Students	41%
Suspended Students	61%
Exceptional Students	57%
ALP is primary instructional program for student.	85%
Is school or program optional to students?	
Yes	52%
No	48%
Does school or program follow the NC Standard Course of Study?	
Yes	98%
No	2%
Is daily attendance required?	
Yes	90%
No	10%

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Table 5. Anticipated Student Enrollment by Grade-Level Groups

Grade-Level Groups	Median	Mean	Range
High School (HS)	50	107	9 - 800
High/Middle School (H/MS)	60	71	6 - 400
Middle School (MS)	35	61	0 - 700
Elementary School (ES)	53	59	24 - 100

At the level of Grade-Level Groups (Table 5), there was a large difference between High School and other Grade-Level Groups in the averages (means) for the anticipated student enrollment but not for the median numbers. This trend is a result of some very large programs in the High School and Middle School groups that affected the average score more than the median (middle) score, since mean or average is more sensitive to influence by numbers at the extreme ends of the range.

Class Schedules

ALPs offer a variety of schedules and exist for a variety of purposes. The Program Survey asked for an indication of the presence of various schedules and types of programs (Table 6). ALPs may fall in more than one category so that the total yields more than 100 percent.

The most common type of program provided regular classes (75%). Half of the programs were catch up/remedial in nature and 18 percent were accelerated programs. ALPs were offered in an extended day setting one third of the time. Summer programs were offered in about one-fourth (23%) of ALPs.

Table 6. Percent of ALPs by Type of Programs and/or Schedules

Type of Program/Schedule	Percent Indicated
Regular classes	75
Catch-up/Remedial	49
Extended day	36
Visiting students/dual enrollments	26
Summer program	23
Accelerated	18
Weekend program	2

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Program Goals

The ALPs reported multiple objectives. All of the program objectives that were options in the Program Survey were endorsed by over half of the responding ALPs.

The rankings of objectives were different for the various Grade-Level Groups (Table 7). For High/Middle and Middle School groups, all of the objectives were endorsed by at least three quarters (72%) of the ALPs. Higher academic achievement was the primary objective in all Grade-Level Groups except High/Middle School where improving self-esteem and social interactions were the primary objectives, closely followed by improving school attendance. For Elementary ALPs, reducing violence, improving school attendance, and returning students to mainstream classrooms were endorsed by fewer programs but still by at least half. These issues may not be critical concerns in Elementary grades. Approximately half of the High School programs endorsed reducing violence and disruptive behavior, noticeably below the next lowest endorsed objective (74%), which was improving social interactions.

Table 7. Program Objectives by Percent of Grade-Level Groups

Program Objectives	Percent of Total	Percent by Grade-Level Groups			
		HS	H/MS	MS	ES
Higher academic achievement	90	85	84	100	90
Improve self-esteem	86	84	92	81	70
Improve social interactions	85	74	92	91	80
Improve school attendance	82	83	90	75	50
Return students to mainstream	78	75	84	81	50
Reduce violence and disruptive behavior	66	51	76	72	60

Components Included as a Regular Part of the ALP

Within each Grade-Level Group a common set of standard program components was identified. Following are listed components indicated as a regular part of the ALP and the percent of programs including them. Instructional components are provided for each Grade-Level Group (Table 8), ranked for each response.

Among the top ten rankings for each Grade-Level Group, the following five components were common priorities to all ALPs including:

- small classes,
- needs assessment,
- individualized curriculum or instruction,
- social skill development, and
- self-paced instruction.

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Table 8. Instructional Components by Percent of Grade-Level Group

HS	Percent	H/MS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Small classes	97	Small classes	100	Small classes	100	Small classes	90
Individualized curriculum or instruction	90	Needs Assessment	94	Needs Assessment	94	Needs Assessment	90
Needs Assessment	84	Social skill development	94	Individualized curriculum or instruction	91	Self-Paced instruction	90
Self-Paced instruction	79	Individualized curriculum or instruction	90	Social skill development	81	Individual tutoring service	90
Flexible schedule	78	Transportation	86	Self-Paced instruction	78	Physical Education opportunities	80
Social skill development	76	Personalized education plan	84	Flexible schedule	75	Mastery learning	80
Personalized education plan	73	Mental health	82	Physical Education opportunities	75	Individualized curriculum or instruction	70
Mental health	70	Substance abuse intervention	80	Individual tutoring service	75	Social skill development	70
Mastery learning	60	Self-Paced instruction	78	Transportation	72	Flexible schedule	60
Individual tutoring service	56	Flexible schedule	75	Mastery learning	66	Transportation	60
Substance abuse intervention	56	Physical Education opportunities	73	Mental health	63	Mental health	60
Transportation	54	Youth development	69	Personalized education plan	50	Personalized education plan	60
Health services	51	Health services	68	Health services	50	Health services	60
Physical Education opportunities	49	Individual tutoring service	67	Support services for family	48	Support services for family	60
Support services for family	48	Support services for family	55	Substance abuse intervention	47	Substance abuse intervention	60
Security guard	35	Mastery learning	43	Youth development	47	Youth development	60
Juvenile justice personnel	35	Sexuality intervention	34	Juvenile justice personnel	47	Sexuality intervention	40
Youth development	32	Juvenile justice personnel	33	Sexuality intervention	31	Juvenile justice personnel	30
Child care	30	Security guard	25	Child care	30	Child care	20
Sexuality intervention	27	Child care	14	Security guard	25	Security guard	10

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Availability of security guards to schools has been an interest in the General Assembly. For these ALPs, security guards were cited as a program component in no more than one-third of the ALPs (HS=35%; H/MS, MS=25%; ES=10%).

Academic and Disciplinary Strategies

Programs use academic and behavior incentives and disciplinary methods to keep students focused and actively pursuing educational goals. The Program Survey found that over 97 percent of responding ALPs have behavior standards and disciplinary consequences for *all* students in the system. In addition, around 60 percent have alternative sets of behavior and disciplinary consequences for ALP students. This finding ranged from 40 percent in Elementary School ALPs to 63 percent for High/Middle School ALPs. Moreover, 97 percent of responding ALPs say they have written due process procedures to guide student disciplinary actions for *all* students in the school system. Alternative sets of due process procedures to guide disciplinary actions for ALP students was indicated by a range from 22 percent of High School ALPs to 41 percent for Middle School ALPs.

Incentives Used to Improve Student Conduct

Three incentives were used by *all* Grade-Level Groups more than 50 percent of the time (Table 9). *Praise for high performance and good behavior* was used almost universally and *special activities such as a reward (e.g. field trips)* were used in a range of 63 percent in High School ALPs to 86 percent in High/Middle School ALPs. *Student choice in learning* was the third incentive used by all Grade-Level Groups 50 percent or more of the time. While *academic points or credits awarded* was used by only 40 percent of Elementary Schools, it was among the most frequently used strategies for High School (71%), High/Middle Schools (73%), and Middle Schools (63%).

Table 9. Incentives Offered
Ordered by Percent of Use and Grade-Level Groups

HS	Percent	H/MS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Praise for high performance and good behavior	98	Praise for high performance and good behavior	100	Praise for high performance and good behavior	100	Praise for high performance and good behavior	100
Academic points/credit awarded	71	Special activities as a reward	86	Special activities as a reward	78	Special activities as a reward	70
Special activities as a reward	63	Academic points/credit awarded	73	Free time	66	Student input into decisions	50
Student choice in learning	56	Student input into decisions	67	Academic points/credit awarded	63	Student choice in learning	50
Student input into decisions	54	Certificate of accomplishment	59	Certificate of accomplishment	56	Free time	50
Free time	47	Student choice in learning	57	Student choice in learning	56	Academic points/credit awarded	40
Certificate of accomplishment	46	Free time	57	Student input into decisions	38	Certificate of accomplishment	30
Awards from business	25	Awards from business	47	Awards from business	31	Awards from business	10

Discipline Strategies Used

A greater number of disciplinary strategies than incentives were used across all Grade-Level Groups. Five disciplinary actions were used more than 50 percent of the time by *all* Grade-Level Groups. *Student conference with teacher, phone call to parents,* and *parents asked to come to school* were used almost universally, while *use of review of placement* ranged in use from 80 percent in Elementary School ALPs to 96 percent of High/Middle School ALPs, and *time out outside classroom* ranged from 60 to 82 percent. Three other strategies were used by 50 percent of Elementary Schools and extensively by higher grade level ALPs: *warning of suspension, removal from class, and short term suspension.*

No Grade-Level Group indicated *loss of academic points* as a frequently used discipline strategy. No Elementary School ALP indicated the use of *spanking* and *loss of academic points* as disciplinary methods. However, sixty percent of High\Middle Schools and 20 percent of High Schools indicated use of *spanking* as a disciplinary method.

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A list of disciplinary methods ordered by percent of use within Grade-Level Groups is provided in Table10 that follows.

Table 10. Disciplinary Methods Ordered by Percent of Use and Grade-Level Groups

HS	Percent	H/MS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Phone call to parents	98	Phone call to parents	100	Phone call to parents	97	Phone call to parents	100
Warning of suspension, etc.	95	Parents asked to come to school	100	Parents asked to come to school	97	Parents asked to come to school	100
Parents asked to come to school	94	Student conference with teacher	100	Student conference with teacher	97	Student conference with teacher	100
Student conference with teacher	92	Removal from the classroom	100	Warning of suspension, etc.	97	Review of placement	80
Review of placement	87	Warning of suspension, etc.	96	Removal from the classroom	94	Time out within classroom	80
Removal from the classroom	83	Review of placement	96	Short term suspension	91	Time out outside classroom	60
Short term suspension	75	Short term suspension	92	Review of placement	87	Warning of suspension, etc.	50
Time out outside classroom	71	Time out outside classroom	82	Time out outside classroom	78	Removal from the classroom	50
Expulsion	59	Long term suspension	75	Time out within classroom	72	Short term suspension	50
Long term suspension	53	Time out within classroom	69	Long term suspension	59	In-school suspension	50
Time out within classroom	48	Expulsion	67	Expulsion	50	Long term suspension	20
In-school suspension	27	Spanking	60	In-school suspension	50	Expulsion	20
Spanking	20	In-school suspension	29	Loss of academic points	28	Loss of academic points	0
Loss of academic points	16	Loss of academic points	14	Spanking	13	Spanking	0

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Student Selection

Criteria for Student Selection

The Program Survey asked each respondent for the criteria used for selecting or placing students into their alternative school or program. Responses differed by Grade-Level Groups (Table 11).

Table 11. Criteria for Selecting/Placing Students in ALPs Reported by Percent of Total and Grade-Level Groups

Selection/Placement Criteria	Percent of Total	Percent of Grade-Level groups			
		HS	H/MS	MS	ES
Discipline/behavior problems	83	76	94	88	60
Poor attendance	82	87	80	78	50
Low academic achievement	77	78	71	81	90
Life circumstances	47	65	53	19	10
Drug/alcohol problems	40	40	51	22	20
Health problems	29	43	27	13	0

All ALPs consistently indicated (range from 71 to 94 percent) the use of the following three student selection criteria: *discipline/behavior problems*, *low academic achievement*, and *poor attendance*. *Life circumstances (e.g., work, teen parent)* and *drug/alcohol problems* were more typically indicated for High School and High/Middle School ALPs than others. Nearly half (43%) of the High School ALPs indicated *health problems* as a reason for student selection while *health problems* was rarely indicated for High/Middle School and Middle School and not at all for Elementary ALPs.

High School ALPs and, to a slightly lesser extent, High/Middle School ALPs, had the widest range of criteria for selection of students into alternative learning programs. Elementary School ALP students are more often selected or placed in ALPs for three of the six major criteria, which may indicate that some of the criteria do not manifest themselves as often for younger children.

Students Excluded from ALPs

The Program Survey asked the respondents to indicate any special needs categories of students that were excluded from alternative schools and programs. Responses did not differ greatly by Grade-Level Groups (Table 12). No category was excluded more than one-third of the time.

Table 12. Categories of Students Excluded From ALPs by Percent of Programs

Categories of Student Classification	Percent Excluded
Trainable mentally handicapped	32
Willie M.	27
Behavioral/emotional handicapped	27
Educable mentally handicapped	27
Learning disabled	16
Gifted and talented	9
Section 504	7
Limited English Proficiency	6

Source of Referral to ALP

The Program Survey asked about referral sources for students considered for placement in ALPs. Responses differed for Grade-Level Groups. Table 13 presents the referral sources ordered by percent of use for each Grade-Level Group.

The most frequent sources of referral to ALPs vary by Grade-Level Group. *Teacher referral* was the most frequent source for Middle School and Elementary School ALPs but was used less frequently by High School and High/Middle School ALPs. *Parental request* was used by half or more of each Grade-Level Group, but was the top source (75%) for High/Middle School ALPs. *Counselor referral* was the top (High School) or second source for all Grade-Level Groups. *Student request* was used most frequently by High School ALPs (67%) and least frequently by Elementary School ALPs (30%).

Table 13. Sources of Referral to ALPs by Grade-Level Groups and Percent of Use

HS	Percent	H/MS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Counselor referral	89	Parental request	75	Teacher referral	81	Teacher referral	100
Parental request	70	Counselor referral	63	Counselor referral	65	Counselor referral	70
Student request	67	Student request	47	Parental request	63	Parental request	50
Teacher referral	65	Teacher referral	43	Student request	50	Student request	30
Principal	11	Principal	27	Principal	28	Principal	0

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Responsibility for Final Placement Decision

The Program Survey asked who had the final responsibility for placing the student in an ALP. Responses differed for Grade-Level Groups. Table 14 presents an analysis of final authority for placement in ALPs, ordered by percent of use for each Grade-Level Group.

While no single final placement authority is used by the majority of ALPs, a committee of both ALP and home school staff is predominant for all Grade-Level Groups. The trend is for the principal or a committee from the ALP to be the next most frequent authority for final placement.

Table 14. Final Authority for Placement in ALPs by Grade-Level Groups and Percent of Use

HS	Percent	H/MS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Committee from both	32	Committee from both	41	Committee from both	28	Committee from both	50
Principal of alternative	24	Principle of alternative	20	Principal of alternative	19	Committee of alternative school	20
Principal of home school	15	Committee of alternative school	16	Principal of home school	13	Principal of alternative	10
Committee of alternative school	11	Superinten-dent/School Board	13	Committee of alternative school	9	Principal of home school	10
Committee of home school	6	Principle of home school	6	Committee of home school	6	Committee of home school	10
Student assistance team	2	Committee of home school	2	Student assistance team	6	Student assistance team	0
Superinten-dent/School Board	0	Student assistance team	0	Superinten-dent/School Board	0	Superinten-dent/School Board	0

Characteristics of Students in ALPs

Student Data Forms were sent to all identified ALPs in January 1996 with the request that a form be completed for each student who had been in enrollment in the first semester of the 1995-96 school year. ALPs that did not respond with forms were contacted to encourage return of Student Data Forms. In May 1996, ALPs were asked to update Student Data Forms for students who were enrolled both first and second semesters. Additionally, they were asked to complete new Student Data Forms for students newly enrolled in ALPs during second semester. Further, ALPs that still had not responded to the first semester data request were sent additional Student Data Forms, asking that they be completed on all students enrolled in the ALP during that school year.

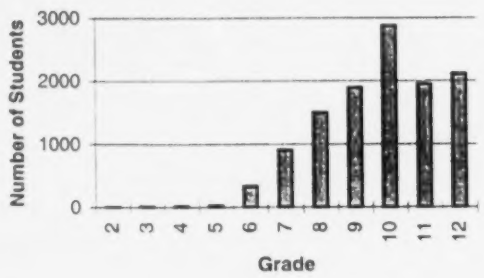
Student Data Forms were typically filled out by teachers or support staff. These forms asked for information about the students, their participation in the ALP, their suspension/expulsion record during the 1995-96 school year, their progress towards earning promotion credits, and meeting graduation requirements.

Student Data Forms were returned for 11,900 students from 166 ALPs. This represents a return rate of 77 percent for the identified ALPs. It is 79 percent of the number of students that the ALP program administrators predicted would be served when they were asked for that information in the middle of the school year.

Grade Levels of Students Served

Students in the ALPs are predominantly in the upper grades. The highest level of student enrollment in ALPs is at tenth grade (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of Students by Grade



The Student Data Forms were divided into three Grade-Level Groups based on the students' reported grade levels (Table 15). Students enrolled in grades K through 5 were placed in an Elementary School group, grades 6 through 8 were placed in a Middle School group, and grades 9 through 12 were placed in a High School group. Across the state there are some differences in the grade level combinations but the groupings described were judged to be the most common way of configuring Elementary, Middle, and High Schools.

Table 15. Grade Levels for Students Enrolled in ALPs, 1995-96

Grade-Level	Number	Percent of Total
High School	6,961	58.5
Middle School	4,313	36.2
Elementary	412	3.5
Unknown	214	1.8

The final number of usable Student Data Forms with known grade levels is 11,686.

Reasons for Participating in ALPs

The primary and secondary reasons for the student participating in the ALP was asked. Both reasons for the student participating in the ALP were used for this analysis. Within each Grade-Level Group, each category of reason was compared to the total reasons to calculate the percent for that response (Table 16).

For both High School and Elementary School students, the most common reason for entry into an ALP was academic (HS=36%, ES=42%). For Middle School students, disruptive behavior (40%) was the most common reason. Disruptive behavior was an important reason for Elementary School (39%) as well, but not for High School (13%) students. In High School, attendance and truancy (27%) was the second most common reason for entry.

Table 16. Reasons for Participation in an ALP by Grade Level and Percent

HS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Academic	36	Disruptive Behavior	40	Academic	42
Attendance/truancy	27	Academic	26	Disruptive Behavior	39
Disruptive Behavior	13	Attendance/truancy	16	Attendance/truancy	6
Pregnancy	5	Serious threat	6	Serious threat	5
Work or Job	3	Pregnancy	2	Health/Mental Health	3
Substance Abuse	2	Substance Abuse	2		
Serious threat	2	Health/Mental Health	1		
Health/Mental Health	2				
Returning student	2				
Volunteer/parent request	1				

Demographic Characteristics

In completing information about student residential living arrangements, ALP teachers completed the information for each student according to their best judgment and available information. In some cases, teachers asked students about their residential living arrangement. Accuracy of the data is uncertain, but estimates should be a fair representation for at-risk students statewide.

Students reside most often in single parent households (Table 17), usually headed by the mother. In the case of Middle and Elementary School ALP students, single parent household, mother or father only, is the living arrangement for a majority of students. Two parent households, with either biological or step parents, represents residential living arrangements for a range from 36 percent of ALP students in Middle and Elementary Schools to 42 percent of ALP students in High Schools.

Table 17. Living Arrangements by Grade Level and Percent

Living Arrangement	Percent of Students		
	HS	MS	ES
Mother Only	39.0	45.0	46.0
Father only	6.0	6.0	5.0
Mother and Father	32.0	24.0	22.0
Mother and Stepfather	8.0	9.0	13.0
Father and Stepmother	2.0	3.0	1.0
Guardian	5.0	4.0	1.5
Grandparent(s)	4.0	6.0	9.0
Own Residence	3.0	0.5	0.0
Other family	1.0	0.5	0.0
Friend	1.0	0.5	0.0
Foster Home	0.5	1.0	1.5
Group Home	0.5	1.0	1.5
Boyfriend/Girlfriend Parent	0.5	0.0	0.0

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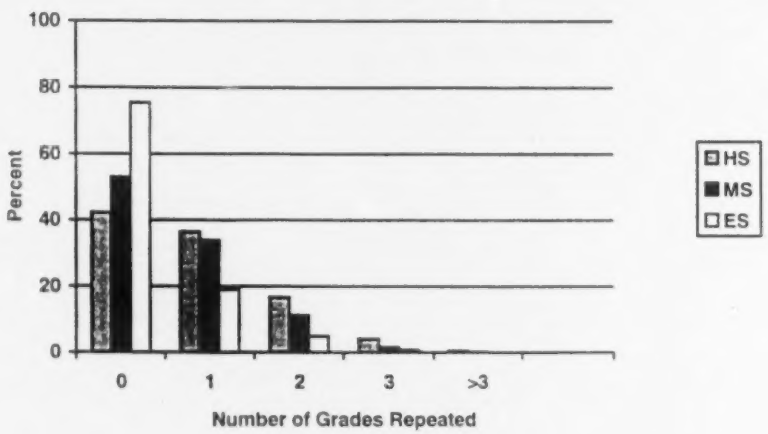
Grades Repeated for ALP Students

As students move into upper grades, a larger percentage are reported to have repeated one or more grades (Figure 4). More than half (57%) of High School ALP students had repeated one or more grades. Slightly less than half (47%) of Middle School ALP students had repeated one or more grades. A quarter (25%) of Elementary School ALP students had repeated a grade.

Figure 4. Number of Repeated Grades by Percent and Grade Levels



Status of Student After Exiting ALPs

At the time the Student Data Forms were completed, about two thirds (64%) of the students in High School ALPs had exited the program (Table 18). Half of the students in Middle School ALPs left the program during the school year and about one-third (36%) of Elementary School ALP students had exited the program.

Teachers were asked where students went upon exiting the ALP. For Elementary (78%) and Middle (54%) school ALP students, the most common response was that students had returned to their home schools. For High School ALP students, the most common response was that they had dropped out (38%), followed by the response that they had returned to their home schools (28%). Nineteen percent (19%) of Middle School ALP students were reported to have dropped out upon exiting the ALP.

Table 18. Status After Exiting Program by Grade Level and Percent

HS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Dropout	38	Return to Home School	54	Return to Home School	78
Return to Home School	28	Dropout	19	Transfer to another school	11
Graduate	19	Transfer to another school	10	Expulsion/suspension	3
GED, Job Corp	6	Expulsion/suspension	8	Training school, etc.	3
Transfer to another school	3	Training school, etc.	6	Hospital/homebound	2
Expulsion/suspension	3	Hospital/homebound	2	Graduate	1.5
Training school, etc.	2	GED, Job Corp	1.5	GED, Job Corp	0.5
Hospital/ homebound	0.5	Graduate	0.2	Dropout	0

The status on exiting was categorized as a "desirable" (return to home school, graduation, GED, Job Corp) or as an "undesirable" result (dropout, expulsion/suspension, training school). The percentage of students with a "desirable" status declined from a high of 80 percent at Elementary School to a low of 53 percent at High School (Table 19).

Table 19. Exit Status by Grade Level and Percent

Exit Status	Percent of Students		
	HS	MS	ES
Desirable	53	56	80
Undesirable	43	32	6

Expulsions

Some of the students were reported to have been expelled during the school year (Table 20). It is not known whether the expulsions took place from the home school or the ALP. Based on discussions with staff in the ALPs, there may be some confusion between expulsion and long term suspensions. Long term suspensions are ended upon meeting conditions of the suspension (a designated time period, at a minimum). When a student is expelled from a school, the student cannot return to that school and most often cannot return to another school within that district. However, alternative learning program legislation gives school districts the option of admitting expelled students into ALPs or creating ALPs to serve expelled and suspended students.

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Table 20. Expelled Students by Grade Levels

Grade Level	Percent
High School	2.7
Middle School	6.0
Elementary School	3.2

The reported reasons for expulsion represented serious behaviors. The most common reason, across Grade Levels, was "severe disruptive behavior" (43%). The next most common cause was fighting (19%). For Elementary School ALP students these reasons represented almost all of the expulsions (there were 13 reported). High School and Middle School ALPs also reported weapons violations (10% of expulsions), behavior involving controlled substances (10% of expulsions), and conflict with teacher/principal (6%) as other causes for expulsion with rates above 5 percent. Other named reasons for expulsion, with rates below 5 percent, included: attendance/truancy, rape, assault with weapon, incarceration, larceny, and deemed a serious threat to safety of the school.

Suspensions

The Student Data Forms asked for details about suspensions during the 1995-96 school year. It is not known whether these suspensions took place before, during, or after the ALP placement. A minority (29%) of High School students in ALPs had been suspended during the year. The rate of suspensions for Middle and Elementary School ALP students was higher (MS = 64%, ES = 46%).

For those students who had been suspended, the average number of days in suspension was approximately 2 weeks (Table 21). Middle School ALP students were suspended slightly longer than Elementary and High School ALP students.

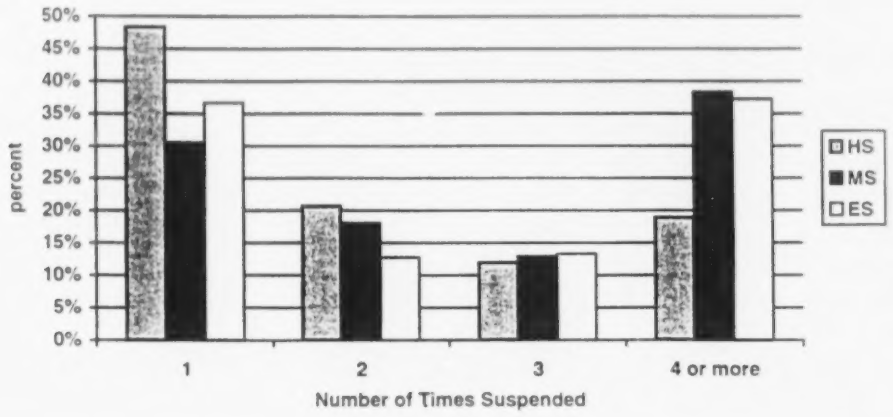
Most suspensions were out-of-school suspensions. In Middle and Elementary School ALP students who had been suspended received out-of-school suspensions about seven out of ten times. High School ALP students who had been suspended received out-of-school suspensions half of the time.

Table 21. Suspension Data for ALP Students by Grade Level

Suspension Data	HS	MS	ES
Percent of Students Suspended	29	64	46
Percent of Suspensions by Type			
In school	39	23	25
Out-of-school	50	70	68
Long term	11	7	7
Number of Days Suspended			
Average	9.6	12.3	10.9
Median	10	10	9

Figure 5 shows the number of times students were suspended by Grade Levels. More Middle and Elementary School ALP students were suspended during the school year and, for those who were suspended, Middle and Elementary School ALP students were suspended a greater number of times than High School ALP students. Almost half (48%) of High School students who were suspended were suspended only once, whereas in Middle and Elementary School ALPs about one-third (MS= 31%, ES = 37%) who were suspended were suspended only once. More than a third (MS = 38%, ES = 37%) of Middle and Elementary ALP students who were suspended were suspended four or more times during the school year. In High School, 19 percent of ALP students who had been suspended were suspended four or more times.

Figure 5. Number of Times Students were Suspended by Grade Levels and Percent



Most students were suspended for reasons related to *disruptive behavior* (Table 22). This category covers a wide range of behaviors including, verbal threats, refusing to cooperate, profanity, as well as fighting, setting fires, theft, and bomb threats. Disruptive

behavior was the most frequently reported reason for suspension for all grade levels, ranging from 63 percent High School grades to 87 percent for Elementary School grades. Attendance/truancy and drug/alcohol/tobacco violations were distant second and third reasons respectively for suspension for High and Middle School students.

Table 22. Reasons for Suspension by Grade Levels and Percent

HS	Percent	MS	Percent	ES	Percent
Disruptive behavior	62.8	Disruptive behavior	76.2	Disruptive behavior	86.5
Attendance truancy	19.4	Attendance truancy	9.5	Assault on school employees	2.2
Drugs/alcohol/ tobacco	11.8	Drugs/alcohol/ tobacco	7.3	Attendance truancy	2.1
Possession of a weapon	1.4	Assault on school employees	1.7	Possession of a weapon	1.9
Assault resulting in serious personal injury	1.1	Possession of a weapon	1.5	Drugs/alcohol/ tobacco	1.0
Possession of a controlled substance	1.0	Assault resulting in serious personal injury	1.1	Assault resulting in serious personal injury	0.9
Assault on school employees	0.9	Possession of a controlled substance	0.9	Possession of a controlled substance	0.5
Violated contract	0.5	Sexual Offense	0.5	Violated contract	0.5
Possession of a firearm	0.3	Robbery	0.3	Sexual Offense	0.3
Assault involving use of a weapon	0.2	Violated contract	0.3	Possession of a firearm	0.3
Robbery	0.1	Assault involving use of a weapon	0.2	Robbery	0.0
Sexual Offense	0.1	Possession of a firearm	0.2	Assault involving use of a weapon	0.0
Armed Robbery	0.1	Sexual Assault	0.1	Sexual Assault	0.0
Extortion	0.1	Larceny	0.1	Larceny	0.0
Indecent liberties with minor	0.1	Indecent liberties with minor	0.0	Indecent liberties with minor	0.0
Kidnapping	0.0	Extortion	0.0	Extortion	0.0
Homicide	0.0	Kidnapping	0.0	Kidnapping	0.0
Larceny	0.0	Rape	0.0	Rape	0.0
Rape	0.0	Felony	0.0	Felony	0.0
Sexual Assault	0.0	Armed Robbery	0.0	Armed Robbery	0.0
Crime	0.0	Homicide	0.0	Homicide	0.0
Felony	0.0	Crime	0.0	Crime	0.0

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Characteristics of Teachers in Alternative Learning Programs

Packages of Teacher Surveys were sent to each identified ALP with the request that each certified teacher in the alternative school or program be given a survey to complete anonymously. The survey package included an introductory letter, the survey, and an addressed return envelope that could be put directly into the State courier mail system by the teacher without returning it to the ALP program administrator/principal.

Six hundred fifty-four surveys were returned from teachers in 174 schools and programs (81% of identified ALPs). These represented 57 percent of the estimated number of teachers in ALPs.

The respondents of the Teacher Survey were divided into four grade-level groupings based on the population they served. Grade-level groupings conform to divisions that are made by schools in structuring their own instructional programs. The groupings represent teachers in alternative schools and programs that serve:

Only High School students **HS** (N=234)
High School and Middle School students **H/MS** (N=173)
Only Middle School students **MS** (N=88)
Only Elementary **ES** (N=29)
Combination (N=130)

The Combination category refers to ALPs which serve Elementary School and either Middle School or High School.

ALP Teacher Characteristics

Teachers were asked to give demographic information about themselves, their experience in teaching, and their experience with alternative learning programs.

- Gender: About two thirds of the respondents (64%) were female. Teachers in Elementary schools were more likely to be female (86%) than teachers in upper grades.

- Experience: Over half of the responding teachers (55%) had ten or more years of teaching experience (Table 23) and less than 10 percent were first year teachers. These teachers have less experience working in an ALP. About 40 percent had one year or less of ALP experience and almost 75 percent had 3 years or less. These data may to some extent be a function of the length of time such programs were available in their districts.

- Education: When asked about education, about two thirds (64%) reported a bachelors degree as the highest degree earned; about one third (31%) of respondents had a masters degree and a small percent (5%) had a sixth year degree or doctorate.

- Training: When asked about training, about two thirds (64%) reported feeling adequately trained/prepared to work with students like those in their ALP.

Table 23. Characteristics of Teachers in ALPs

Characteristics	Percent
Gender	
Male	36
Female	64
Years worked in field	
One year or less	10
2 to 3 years	14
4 to 5 years	10
6 to 9 years	12
10 to 20 years	27
over 20 years	28
Years worked in Alternative Learning Programs	
One year or less	38
2 to 3 years	34
4 to 5 years	9
6 to 9 years	9
10 to 20 years	8
over 20 years	2
Highest earned degree	
Bachelors	64
Masters	31
Sixth year/specialist	3
Doctorate	2

Teacher Credentials for ALP Work Assignments

Teachers were asked about how they were hired for the ALP. Almost 90 percent of the respondents were hired in ALPs voluntarily: through request, optional assignment, or by applying. Eleven percent (11%) reported obtaining their ALP positions through administrative assignment, by transfer, or through some other non-voluntary manner.

Teachers were asked whether or not they were certified in the grades and/or subject areas they currently taught. Both for **grades** and **subjects** they could answer either "all," "some," or "none." Within Grade-Level Groups (Table 24), Elementary School ALP teachers were most likely to be certified in all grades and subjects for which they taught (78.3%). ALPs which served Middle School students (MS, H/MS) were least likely to have teachers certified in all grades and all subjects taught (52%).

Only 3.2 percent of High School ALP teachers were not certified either in subject or grade level taught, while 8.7 percent of Elementary School ALP teachers were not certified in those areas. Table 24 further reports separately, for both grade levels and subjects, the percent of teachers being certified in either all, some or none of these areas.

Table 24. Percent of Teachers Certified in Grade/Subject Taught by Grade-Level Groups

Type of Certification	Percent of Teachers			
	HS	H/MS	MS	ES
Certified all grades/ all subjects taught	67.6	52.6	52.7	78.3
Certified no grades/ no subjects taught	3.2	6.7	8.1	8.7
Certified no grades taught	4.4	8.2	9.3	10.7
Certified some grades taught	10.1	17.0	12.8	3.6
Certified all grades taught	85.5	74.7	77.9	85.7
Certified no subjects taught	5.2	10.0	12.0	8.3
Certified some subjects taught	24.1	32.0	32.0	16.7
Certified all subjects taught	70.7	58.0	56.0	75.0

Teaching Load

Teachers were asked about their teaching load: the number of different subjects/courses taught, the number of classes/periods taught daily, and the unduplicated count of students taught daily. Teachers in different Grade-Level Groups appear to have different demands placed on them (Table 25). In Elementary School ALPs, teachers report a class size of 5 students, while in Middle and High School settings, the average class size is more consistently between 20 and 27. The number of classes or class periods is also reflective of the way in which the Grade-Level Groups are organized. Elementary ALP teachers stay with a class, which explains the median number of classes taught per day being 1. Middle and High School ALPs teachers, however, report seeing more than one class of students a day, a median of 5 classes per day for Middle School and High/Middle School ALP teachers, and 3 classes per day for High School ALP teachers.

Teachers instruct in a variety of subjects, but the median number is two to four. More teachers in Middle and High School grades appear to work in ALPs as a larger part of their teaching duties than teachers at the Elementary School level. The median number of weekly hours of teaching in Elementary School ALPs is 3 compared to 30 for Middle School ALPs, 31 for High/Middle School ALPs, and 17 for High School ALPs. Elementary School ALP teachers do not report many hours in planning, case management, and outside effort; but Middle and High School staff report a median of 5 hours of planning and 5 hours spent outside of the regular school day per week on behalf of ALPs.

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Table 25. Teaching Loads by Median for Grade-Level Groups

Teaching Load Variables	Median			
	HS	H/MS	MS	ES
Number of students taught daily (unduplicated)	22	27	20	5
Number of classes/periods taught daily	3	5	5	1
Number of different subjects	2	4	2	2
Weekly hours teaching in ALPs	17	31	30	3
Weekly hours of official planning /case management	5	5	5	0
Weekly hours spent outside school day for ALPs	5	5	5	1

The way in which classes are organized during a typical week is somewhat dependent on the Grade-Level Group of the ALP (Table 26). There was an emphasis on small group and individual work for all Grade-Level Groups; but it was most prevalent at the Elementary level where all of the instruction was reported to be either in small groups or at individual student levels.

Table 26. Classroom Instruction Percent by Grade-Level Groups

Classroom Instruction	Percent of Class Time			
	HS	H/MS	MS	ES
Class lecture	10	10	10	0
Class discussion	10	20	20	0
Small group	20	20	25	50
Individual student work	40	40	35	40

For purposes of analysis, categories for the amount of homework assigned were combined, and the extremes are presented (homework two or more times per week and homework once a month or less). From 25 to 39 percent of ALP teachers report assigning homework two or more times a week (Table 27). Elementary School and Middle School ALPs assign homework more frequently than High School and High/Middle School ALPs, where the assignment of homework is less common. It was most often the case that ALPs assigned homework once a month or less.

Table 27. Homework Assigned by Median Percent for Grade-Level Groups

How Often Homework is Assigned	Median Percent			
	HS	H/MS	MS	ES
2 or more times a week	26	25	39	35
Once a month or less	54	54	43	52

Facilities and Program

Teachers were asked if they had adequate resources available to them for instructional materials (Table 28). In general, the ratings for Elementary teachers were higher than teachers in other Grade-Level Groups, indicating a higher level of satisfaction regarding adequacy of materials. Further, in two categories, from 73 - 82 percent of teachers in other Grade-Level Groups rated resources as adequate including: availability of textbooks that are not outdated and textbooks that are in good condition. That still leaves up to one quarter (18 - 27%) of these teachers rating these resources as inadequate. For other categories of resources there was greater variability. In particular, from 49 to 60% of teachers in upper grade level ALPs rated the following three categories as being inadequate to meet instructional needs:

- High interest reading materials
- Computers available
- Reference material available

Table 28. Adequacy of Resources
Percent by Grade-Level Groups

	Percent "Yes"			
	HS	H/MS	MS	ES
There are enough textbooks	69	58	60	83
Textbooks are not outdated	79	73	78	76
Textbooks are in good condition	82	81	81	79
Textbooks are well suited for students	66	61	53	72
High interest reading material is available	51	45	58	83
Computers are adequate to meet instructional needs	56	57	59	59
Reference material is adequate to meet instructional needs	53	40	56	69
Audio/visual equipment is adequate to meet instructional needs	67	62	74	59

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When asked if the facilities were adequate in the ALPs, Elementary teachers said facilities were superior or adequate 86 percent of the time. High School and Middle School ALP teachers rated the facilities as superior or adequate around 70 percent of the time, while High/Middle School ALP teachers rated the facilities as superior or adequate 63 percent of the time.

When teachers rated the facilities for their ALP as "inadequate" they were asked to indicate the reason for that rating (Table 29). The specific areas which were judged inadequate have some overlap (Elementary was excluded because of very small number [N=29] of teachers responding that facilities were inadequate). The first and second specific areas of concern about facilities in all upper grade categories were "gets too hot or cold" and "insufficient access to equipment." Other responses which were common in all upper grade categories included "overcrowding," "not handicapped accessible," "walls or ceilings decaying," and "unsanitary." The full list of responses appears in Table 29 in the order of the percent of teachers citing a problem in each Grade-Level Group.

Table 29. Reasons for Rating Facility as "Inadequate" by Grade-Level Groups

HS	Percent	H/M	Percent	MS	Percent
Gets too hot or cold	63	Gets too hot or cold	56	Gets too hot or cold	56
Insufficient access to equipment	56	Insufficient access to equipment	53	Insufficient access to equipment	52
Overcrowded	44	Walls or ceilings decaying	42	Not handicap accessible	52
Not handicap accessible	28	Not handicap accessible	41	Walls or ceilings decaying	48
Walls or ceilings decaying	27	Overcrowded	39	Overcrowded	41
Unsanitary	20	Unsanitary	33	Inadequate lighting	37
		Unclean	33	Unclean	33
		No ventilation	25	Located in unsafe place	30
		Uncomfortable seats	23	Unsanitary	26
		Inadequate lighting	20	No ventilation	22
				Uncomfortable seats	22

Beliefs/School Climate

Teachers were asked to rate both the ALP and "the home school(s) from which your students originate" on a series of statements about the instructional environments in both settings. Ratings were made on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A large percent of teachers (more than 90%) responded about their own ALPs but many did not respond about home schools. The response to the home school component was generally less than 50 percent. Therefore, analysis which reports on the ratings for ALPs is stronger than that which reports on differences between the ALPs and the "home school" ratings. Only the largest differences between the ALPS and "home school" will be reported.

Teachers responded with much stronger agreement to the following statements when they were applied to the ALPS than when they were applied to the home school:

- "Students feel they belong."
- "It helps students build self-confidence."
- "There is respect shown for students."
- "It is responsive to the diverse educational needs of its students."
- "Teachers care about students."

For three of the areas where a difference was found between ALP versus home school, not only did the ALP teachers agree with the statement more strongly when applied to the ALP, but they disagreed with the following statements when applied to the home school:

- "It is responsive to the diverse educational needs of its students."
- "It helps students build self-confidence."
- "There is respect shown for students."

Funding of Alternative Schools and Programs

There was no requirement to track the funds of Alternative Learning Programs to the school or program level in 1995-96. Responses to the Program Survey's fiscal questions also indicated that some ALPs did not have separate budgets and therefore could not provide a total cost or budget amount for their school or program. Even so, over 90 percent of those returning Program Surveys were able to provide a total cost for the school or program when asked.

The information provided in this report related to program costs is based on unconfirmed estimates of program costs. The survey was not completed by the district fiscal officer, though the survey respondent may have consulted with district fiscal staff. The self reported data are presented to give an estimate of costs and are not reported as an official analysis of costs.

Budgets

The average ALP annual budgets differ markedly among Grade-Level Groups (Table 30). At the school district level, ALP allocations include funds from local, state, and federal appropriations, which contribute to the variation in total budget allocations across ALPs, as does size of district, average daily membership, and number of children in poverty.

Table 30. Total Budget Allocations for ALPs

Grade-Level Groups	Average ALP Budget	Median ALP Budget	Range of ALP Budgets
High School	$214,417	$80,000	$3,000 - $2,343,122
High/Middle School	$280,344	$200,000	$8,867 - $1,219,963
Middle School	$172,145	$51,452	$8,223 - $1,580,000
Elementary School	$69,514	$85,500	$4,320 - $156,000

There were a small number of very expensive programs which affect the average budget figures more than the median budget figures. In cases where there are extremes, the median, where half the programs are below the median and half above, is often used as a better estimate of "average."

Budget allocations also differed markedly if the respondent was in an alternative school versus an alternative program. The median budget for an alternative school was $239,811 and for an alternative program $70,000. Of course the schools, on the average, served more students than programs and often had more administrative and facility costs as well.

Only 22 percent of ALPs reported that they would receive additional funding if they exceeded their student enrollment capacity.

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State Funding

The Program Survey asked what approximate percentage the State funding represents of the total funding for each ALP (Table 31). The responses varied somewhat by Grade-Level Groups, but the average percentage of state funding was within a 10 percentage point range (60 - 69%). The median percentage score is more representative of the amount of State funding that supports ALPs. Half of the ALPs relied on state funding for at least three quarters of their support. This finding suggests a heavy reliance on State funds for such programs. With regard to local funding, half of the ALPs had 10 percent or less in local funds supporting their program.

Table 31. Percentage of Budget Represented by State Funds

Grade-Level Groups	Level of State Funding	
	Mean Percent	Median Percent
High School	60	72
High-Middle School	69	85
Middle School	66	100
Elementary School	65	86

Uses of Funds

Table 32 shows how ALPs spent program funds, and lists use of funds by Grade-Level Groups, with funding categories ranked. There are three main categories of expenditures: Services, Personnel Salaries, and Equipment/Materials. Clearly, the primary use of funds for all ALPs was hiring teachers (Personnel category), and purchasing instructional materials (Equipment/Materials category).

The top four uses of funds in the Services category for High School, High/Middle School, and Middle School were instructional support, staff development, transportation, and guidance counseling. In Elementary School ALPs, the top uses of funds were instructional support, transportation, and tutoring. Elementary School ALPs did not use funds in the Personnel category to hire administrative staff. Approximately one-fourth to one-half of other ALP Grade-Level Groups use these funds to hire administrative staff. Computers and software were significant Equipment/Materials purchases, especially for High/Middle School ALPs (82%).

Table 32. ALP Use of Funds by Grade Level Groups and Funding Category

High School		High/Middle School		Middle School		Elementary School	
Funding Category	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**
Services		**Services**		**Services**		**Services**	
Instructional support	49	Staff development	86	Instructional support	59	Instructional support	40
Staff development	49	Instructional support	71	Staff development	53	Transportation	40
Guidance counseling	38	Transportation	57	Transportation	41	Tutoring	40
Transportation	29	Guidance counseling	49	Guidance counseling	34	Staff development	20
Afterschool classes	27	Mediation training	45	Mediation training	28	Social skill classes	20
Job counseling	23	Social skill classes	43	Social skill classes	25	Afterschool classes	20
Social skill classes	22	Drug and alcohol prevention	37	Tutoring	22	Guidance counseling	10
Tutoring	21	Job counseling	29	Job counseling	16	Mediation training	10
Mediation training	17	Afterschool classes	24	Parent training classes	13	Job counseling	10
Parent training classes	11	Tutoring	12	Drug and alcohol prevention	9	Parent training classes	10
Drug and alcohol prevention	10	Parent training classes	12	In school suspension class	9	Drug and alcohol prevention	10
In school suspension class	6	In school suspension class	10	Afterschool classes	6	Parent literacy programs	10
Parent literacy programs	3	Parent literacy programs	4				
Personnel salaries		**Personnel salaries**		**Personnel salaries**		**Personnel salaries**	
Teachers	83	Teachers	92	Teachers	75	Teachers	50
Teacher assistants	30	Teacher assistants	55	Teacher assistants	38	Tutors	40
Guidance counselors	21	Guidance counselors	39	Guidance counselors	25	Teacher assistants	10
Social workers	19	Social workers	37	Principal	22	Guidance counselors	10
Assistant principal	16	Principal	31	Psychologists	13	Social workers	10
Career counselors	16	Psychologists	18	Social workers	9		
Principal	14	Assistant principal	14	School resource officer	9		
School resource officer	13	School resource officer	10	Assistant principal	6		
Psychologists	11	Coordinator	10	Nurses	6		
Nurses	11	Nurses	8	Tutors	6		
Tutors	8	Career counselors	8	Career counselors	3		
Coordinator	5	Tutors	4				

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(Table 32 - continued)

High School		High/Middle School		Middle School		Elementary School	
Funding Category	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**	**Funding Category**	**Percent of Programs**
Materials and Equipment		**Materials and Equipment**		**Materials and Equipment**		**Materials and Equipment**	
Instructional materials	76	Instructional materials	94	Instructional materials	69	Instructional materials	60
Software	57	Computers	82	Computers	47	Software	40
Computers	54	Software	82	Telephones	44	Computers	30
Telephones	44	Telephones	55	Software	41	Telephones	10

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Additional Funding Needs

The Program Survey gave the respondents an opportunity to comment on what they would change about ALPs. About one-third of the changes related to funding. More funding, expanding the number of students served, and providing for more instructional and resource material represented 14 percent of the suggestions for changes. More teachers and/or smaller classes followed with 10 percent of the responses for change. Additional support staff, primarily school counselors and psychologists, was mentioned in 7 percent of the responses. Finally, providing more computer capability was mentioned in 4 percent of the requests for changes.

Teachers had a similar response when asked for things that they would change about ALPs. Twenty- one percent responded that increased funding is a desired change. Increased support staff was mentioned in 7 percent of the responses and smaller classes in 5 percent.

Summary

Two hundred and fifteen (215) schools and programs were identified that met the evaluation criteria as an Alternative Learning Program. ALPs were identified in 85 percent of the LEAs. Seventy-five (75) identified themselves as alternative schools while 140 identified themselves as alternative programs. These numbers for alternative schools versus programs are still being verified.

Programs are dependent on state funds. Half of the ALPs relied on state funding for at least three-quarters of their support.

Overall, top uses of funds were to hire teachers and to purchase instructional materials.

The predominant setting for an ALP was in a separate classroom within an existing school (41%). About one-third (32%) reported being in a separate school on its own campus, while 9 percent reported being in a separate school which shared a campus with a regular school. Schools-within-schools represented one in eight (12%) reporting ALPs.

Data included in this report confirm that in general, students served in ALPs are at-risk students. The majority of ALP students live in single parent households. About half of Middle and High School ALP students had repeated one or more grades. Less than one-third of High School ALP students were suspended during the 1995-96 school year, while half of the Elementary School ALP students, and two-thirds of the Middle School ALP students were suspended some time in the 1995-96 schools year.

Expulsions were not common for High School and Elementary School ALP students (3%), but occurred more frequently for Middle School ALP students (6%).

While the majority of ALP students were in High School grades, the Middle School ALP students had somewhat more severe risk indicators based on suspensions, expulsions, grades repeated, and reason for participating in the program.

ALPs have multiple goals; but the goals of the ALPs almost universally included academic achievement with a strong emphasis on issues of self esteem and social behaviors. Reducing violence and disruptive behavior were also common goals mentioned by the ALPs.

A significant portion of ALPs do not serve long-term suspended students, expelled students, or exceptional students. This observation raises some questions about how the needs of these students are being met through Alternative Learning Programs or within the school system.

For those students who left an ALP before the end of the school year, a majority had "desirable" status after exiting the program (e.g., returning to home school, graduating). However, a sizable number of students had an undesirable status. Students who had either

dropped out, were expelled or suspended, or went to training school or prison, represented 40 percent (High School), 32 percent (Middle School) and six percent (Elementary School) of those who exited the ALP before the end of the school year. It cannot be determined at present whether the percentage kept in school by ALPs is higher than it otherwise would be without such programs; but a genuine effort is being made by many programs to impact positively on students' lives.

Appendix A

ALP Evaluation Questions

Based on the legislative intent and purposes of the evaluation, six evaluation are specified. Each of these six questions contain a number of subsidiary questions. Some of the subsidiary questions could be applied to more than one evaluation question; however, they are listed only under one paramount question.

1. *Where is the location and distribution of alternative learning programs (ALP) across the state?*

   a. How many programs currently exist in the State?
   b. Where are programs located? Does every district have an ALP?
   c. What are the specific sites or settings of the ALPs (e.g., separate building, campus, school within regular school)?

2. *What types of programs/schools are implemented as alternative learning programs?*

   a. What purposes or needs are the programs designed to address? Is there evidence that they actually address these purposes?
   b. What basic types of programs exist? What do they look like?
   c. What basic components/strategies are included in different types of programs?

3. *What students are served by these programs?*

   a. What are the characteristics of students served?
   b. What types of needs or problems do students in the program exhibit?
   c. What role does violence and disruptive behavior play in admission to program?
   d. How do students enter the program? What are referral and placement procedures?
   e. How do students exit the program? What are exit procedures? What are options for student placement upon exit?

4. *How are funds for programs used?*

   a. What sources of funds support the program?
   b. What are basic categories of expenditures (e.g., personnel, services, materials) for the special $3 million allocation?

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5. *What is the impact of the ALP programs?*

a. What are the effects of the programs on achievement (grades 3-6 only at present)?
b. What are the effects of the programs on:
   - attendance?
   - promotion/nonpromotion rates?
   - suspension/expulsion statistics for students/schools?
   - dropping out of school?*
   - overall incidence of crime for the school?*

   (* Note: Answers to these questions will depend on the ability of data collection systems to provide appropriate information and/or ability to track students over time.)
c. Do students, and staff find the programs helpful?
d. What unintended outcomes occur?
e. What effects (beneficial or negative) might the ALPs have on the mainstream, regular education program?

6. *How can the programs be modified and improved?*

a. What is the quality of ALP programs? What factors distinguish quality programs from those of lower quality?
   - What is the perception of students?
   - What is the perception of ALP staff and other district staff?
   - How do programs compare to best practices reported in the research literature?

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Appendix B

Methods of Estimating Number of Teachers in ALPs

ALPs where asked to report on the number of certified teachers who were working in their programs; but not all responded. To estimate the total number of teachers, the returns from the Teacher Survey were used.

For those programs that had reported the number of teachers (N=147), the total number of reported teachers was compared to the total number of teacher surveys which had been returned. A rate of return was calculated for this sub-group and the rate was applied to the total number of returned teacher surveys. *The estimated number of teachers in all ALPs is equal to the number of returned teacher surveys divided by the calculated return rate for programs where the number of teachers was known.*

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